

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT O 00125 171911Z

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

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INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY

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AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 0125

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OEXC TD (STEWART, HELEN)

SUBJECT: STAG HELEN STEWART

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 56; B. STATE 277294

FOLLOWING ARE POST'S MAIN IMPRESSIONS ABOUT HELEN STEWART'S
LECTURES BEFORE AUDIENCES IN PORT OF SPAIN JANUARY 16.

1. IN MORNING SHE SPOKE TO A CLASS OF ABOUT 50 STUDENTS AND
FACULTY MEMBERS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF
WEST INDIES. TOPIC WAS "SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING," BASED MAINLY ON HER EXPERIENCE WORKING IN IVORY
COAST UNDER UNDP. PRESENTATION WAS STRAIGHTFORWARD AND
DESCRIPTIVE. ONE NIGERIAN STUDENT QUESTIONED WHY SHE WAS
CHOSEN TO DO SUCH WORK AND "WHY SOMEONE ELSE COULDN'T DO
IT," PROBABLY MEANING AN AFRICAN. STEWARD EXPLAINED THAT
SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO WORK WITH COUNTERPART IVORY COAST
SOCIOLOGIST BUT APPARENTLY ONE COULD NOT BE FOUND. AN
OUTSPOKENLY ANTI-US PROFESSOR ASKED HER WHY SHE WAS SPEAKING
ON A TOUR UNDER THE USG, MEANING WHY WOULD SHE COOPERATE
WITH A GOVERNMENT OPPOSED TO THIRD WORLD INTERESTS. SHE
EXPLAINED THAT SHE ACCEPTED THE ASSIGNMENT BECAUSE SHE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PORT O 00125 171911Z

UNDERSTOOD SHE WOULD BE FREE TO SPEAK HER MIND AND WOULD NOT

BE UNDER DIRECTIVES ON WHAT TO SAY AND WOULD NOT BE CENSORED. GENERALLY, THIS SESSION WAS POSITIVE BUT NOT VERY PERTINENT TO OUR PROGRAM INTERESTS.

2. LATE IN AFTERNOON STEWART SPOKE ON "WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE US" TO AUDIENCE OF ABOUT 130 LEADERS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND WOMEN PROFESSIONALS, INCLUDING PROMINENT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, LAWYERS, PHYSICIANS AND JOURNALISTS. ORGANIZED BY NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, THE LECUTRE WAS INTRODUCED BY TOP WOMAN JURIST IN TRINIDAD.

3. IN THIS SETTING, STEWART'S DELIVERY AND FORMAT WERE DISTRACTING. HER TALK OF ABOUT 50 MINUTES WAS GIVEN FROM NOTES, NOT WELL ORGANIZED, AND FILLED WITH AN EXCESS OF JARGON AND SLANG SUCH AS "DUDE," "COOL," "STUFF LIKE THAT," WHICH SEEMED INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE LANGUAGE OF A UNIVERSITY LECTURER IN THIS RATHER FORMAL SITUATION.

4. THE TALK ITSELF WAS A VERY SUPERFICIAL AND OFTEN DISTORTED AND ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATION OF, AMONG OTHER THINGS, WOMEN'S LIBERATION ACTIVITIES IN THE US AND TO SOME EXTENT, BLACK HISTORY. THE LECTURE WAS NOT JUST PERMEATED WITH RACIAL OVERTONES BUT DOMINATED BY THEM DESPITE HER PUTATIVE TOPIC OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT. MUCH WAS NEGATIVE AND SOME STATEMENTS WERE FALSE IN PRESENTATION. SHE GLIBLY MADE SUCH STATEMENTS AS: "THE WHITE WOMEN IN THE US WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT HAVE KEPT THE BLACK WOMEN OUT" AND "WHITE AMERICAN WOMEN ARE RACIST FIRST AND FEMINIST SECOND."

5. IN GENERAL, SHE GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A YOUNG PERSON WHO HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO STEP BACK FROM HER RACIAL HANG-UPS TO TAKE A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES. ONE WOULD HAVE FUNDAMENTAL UNDERLYING COMMON ISSUES WHICH FACE ALL WOMEN AND SOME OF THE NEW PERSPECTIVES AND EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT. HER PARTICULARIST VANTAGE POINT WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON RACE DID NOT OFFER MUCH OF A CHALLENGE OR INSPIRATION TO AN AUDIENCE OF CARIBBEAN WOMEN, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME IT PRESENTED A REMARKABLY RACIST PICTURE OF THE US.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PORT O 00125 171911Z

6. MOST DAMAGING TO OUR FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS WAS HER ASSERTION THAT POPULATION PLANNING IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES COULD BE A DEVICE BY THE LARGE POWERS WHO WISH TO CONSERVE RESOURCES FOR THEMSELVES AND SHE BELIEVED THAT THE THIRD WORLD SHOULD BE WARY.

7. REACTION OF TWO HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED TRINIDADIAN WOMEN MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ATYPICAL. AT FIRST THEY WERE SHOCKED AT

EMPHASIS ON RACISM AND FAILURE TO FOCUS ON TOPIC OF WOMEN'S
MOVEMENT. THEN THEY SETTLED DOWN AND DECIDED THAT ACUTE
RACIAL HANG-UP WAS NORMAL FOR AMERICAN BLACK WOMAN. THEY WERE
(AND ARE) CONVINCED THAT HIGHLY DISTORTED VERSION OF THE
UNITED STATES PRESENTED BY STEWART WAS ACCURATE. LESS
SOPHISTICATED AUDIENCE WOULD CERTAINLY BE NO LESS GULLIBLE.

8. IN RETROSPECT, HAD WE KNOWN HOW STEWART'S PRESENTATION
WOULD BE, WE WOULD HAVE RECOMMENDED AGAINST SPONSORING HER.
SHE WAS REALLY RESPONSIVE NEITHER TO THE TOPIC NOT TO THE
AUDIENCE, AND HER IMAGE OF THE US IS BOTH NEGATIVE AND DISTORTED.
THE LARGER QUESTION IS HOW SHE EVER GOT SELECTED IN THE FIRST
PLACE.
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